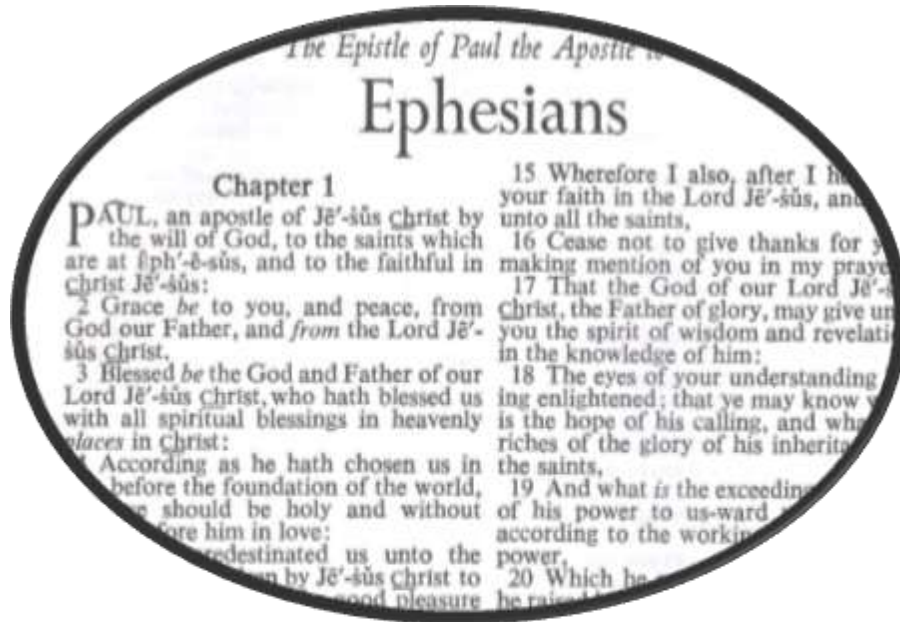


# EPHESIANS – WEEK 2

## THE DETAILS



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Ephesians 2:1–13 – The Details*

The specifics of the plan of salvation reveal why God does what He does. Specifically, the plan of salvation is structured to preclude our boasting about it, and everything is set up so that we will do good works.

Even the good works were designed with that in mind.

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Ephesians 1:1–2:3 – The Details  
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1 Ephesians 2:1–3 (NKJV)

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*

The key here is the word “dead.” We weren’t just lost; we were dead. We weren’t a basket case; we were a casket case.

That terminology seems extreme. It is – intentionally so – to hammer home the point that we are totally unable to save ourselves.

*We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath. ... You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.*

This isn’t a portrait of someone who needs some counseling; this is a portrait of someone who needs a soul transplant. The phrase “*by nature children of wrath*” makes this chillingly clear. This is not a temporary condition.

It is *by nature*.

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This completes the thought begun in verse 1:4, “*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*” We are *by nature*, unable to save ourselves. If God doesn’t choose us, we’re toast.

The pieces of the gospel are starting to fit together. Our fallen human nature makes a mockery of the idea that we can save ourselves. Only God can save us.

And that’s exactly what He did. It’s two sides of the same coin. This passage shows that we can’t take credit for our salvation. Verse 1:4 showed that God gets all the credit.

And, as always, the point is His glory. This plan works. This plan makes sense. This plan is logical.

This plan glorifies God.

2 Ephesians 2:4–7 (ESV)

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

The key words in this passage are, “so that.” They translate something special in Greek called a purpose construct. That tells us why something is the way it is. In this case, we get to see why God does something.

That’s exciting. Our understanding of God’s purposes can’t be all that great. Our finite minds just aren’t up to the task.

But occasionally there’s something that’s not totally over our heads and sometimes, when conditions are right, Paul lets us know God’s holy purposes in His plan. So, reread the part up to the words “so that” in this light.

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Great. We make out like bandits. And why is that?

*So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Wait. That means the purpose of all that great stuff is **not** so that we get to go to heaven. It’s to show something, specifically *the immeasurable riches of his grace*.

It’s all about Him.

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Christianity is usually sold in terms of its benefit to us. “Heaven is a free gift,” we say.

That’s true, but it’s the beginner’s version of the gospel. The adult version reveals the full truth about God and why He does what He does.

And the purpose construct in Greek is one of the wonderful ways that He grows us in the truth and knowledge of Him. It’s a window into the mind of God.

Praise Him for that.

3 Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

This is another purpose construct. The NKJV is a bit more poetic, translating the purpose construct in verse 9 as, “*lest anyone should boast.*” This highlights another important aspect of the purpose construct – it’s about the possibility of something.

The reason that God made salvation by faith and not works is to preclude the possibility of our boasting. Back in verse 7, we saw that the purpose of God making *us alive together with Christ* was so that He *might* show His grace.

In today’s passage, it’s so important that we understand that salvation is not to our credit that Paul says it twice. It’s, “*not of your own doing,*” and it’s, “*not a result of works.*” Got it?

If Paul’s going to lock out any possibility of people boasting about their salvation, he has to make sure they understand it.

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But notice where this leads. If the purpose of salvation by faith alone is to preclude boasting about it, then boasting about it must be an especially egregious sin.

Think about this; which is worse? Robbing a bank or boasting about your salvation?

That depends on your point of view. We tend to think about right and wrong in terms of damage done to people. That counts, but what about damage to God’s glory?

God’s glory is way more important. This gets tricky because laws cannot be made on that basis; they have to be about people. Anything else would be unconstitutional.

So, this forces a gap between a Christian’s view of right and wrong and the law’s view. Everything the law views as wrong, we agree is wrong – but we recognize other wrongs the government doesn’t care about (and shouldn’t care about). Furthermore, some of those religious crimes are much worse.

So, no one will ever get arrested for boasting about their salvation – not should they – but the idea should send chill through you. It’s so offensive to God that the design of the gospel is structured to rule it out.

And there’s another layer to consider. If outright boasting about your salvation is record setting wrong, what about just looking down on non-believers? They’re in a state we were once in – a state that clearly isn’t permanent.

Still, frustration in evangelism can easily devolve into disrespect. Looking down on others is a universal sin. Do not think you’re immune.

Looking down on unbelievers is an evil every Christian must be aware of and explicitly fight against.

4 Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Here is yet another purpose construct, this time not directly about God's glory – though that's never very far away.

What are we?

*His workmanship.*

Why are we *created in Christ Jesus*?

*For good works.*

Why were those *good works prepared beforehand*?

For the purpose *that we should walk in them.*

This is strong stuff. He created us and He created the good works for the purpose that we would do the good works. It's why we exist and why the good works exist.

It's their purpose.

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This is curious, in light of the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. We don't need works to be saved, they're merely our purpose. Why's that any different from saying we have to do them to be saved? If we're not doing them, we're not saved, right?

Well, no. There a technical difference, and there's a practical difference. The technical difference is that a purpose isn't the same as a cause. A lower electricity bill is the purpose for all that fiberglass I added to my attic, but the lower bills didn't cause the fiberglass to appear. I caused the fiberglass to appear in the attic, by rolling it in.

Similarly, works are the purpose of my being saved, but they didn't cause me to be saved. God caused me to be saved by rolling in the Holy Spirit.

The practical difference is the timing. The cause precedes the action; the purpose typically becomes manifest only after the action. The fiberglass went in long before I saw any reduction in my bill.

Similarly, if you're saved for the purpose of works, the works come after you become a Christian, maybe a lot later. You might need some growth and training first.

But if works save you, they have to come first. Your heart and soul would follow your acts, not lead them.

That's not what you see in practice.

5 Ephesians 2:11–13 (NKJV)

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

This isn't just about how far from God the Ephesians, as unbelievers, were. This is about how far away they were, as gentiles. It's about God surprising everyone by expanding His covenant beyond Israel. That's the plot twist nobody saw coming.

Sure, He had said to Abraham, "*In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.*" (Genesis 22:18a, NKJV), but no one thought they'd be **that** blessed.

Time after time, the history of the covenant had been God winnowing His people down to a remnant. His relentless preference for quality over quantity was His hallmark.

Then, suddenly, the covenant goes viral. Everyone's eligible. Change of plans.

Or maybe not. Actually, that was the plan all along. The whole Old Testament was pointing to this; it just wasn't as a gradual progression towards the new order. The stage was being set for a shift of gears, but people who were just looking at the stage couldn't see it.

That's not so unusual. Many phenomena follow this pattern. For example, market bubbles typically look obvious in retrospect but still catch almost everyone by surprise when they happen.

This plot twist exists for, what else, God's glory. But what's He up to? How does this glorify Him? We understand how salvation by grace alone glorifies God, but how does this shift from "remnant, remnant, remnant" to "everyone's invited" fit in? What's so glorifying about that?

It highlights the contrast between Israel's failure and Christ's triumph. The Israelites could barely keep the flame alive. In Christ, it became a wildfire.

To His glory.

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One of the great challenges for a Christian is to learn to love life's little "plot twists." We think we know where things are going and then everything changes. Nine times out of ten, it's not good news either.

Curious thing is, we don't like plot twists even when they are good news. We just don't like disruptions.

This is sin at a fundamental level. We want to control things. The plot twists are God's doing, and we don't want to cede control to Him. But He has control, whether we like it or not.

When plans change, look for, and appreciate, God's hand in things. You can feel His presence.

